

Arden

Volume VI
Spring 2004





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Arden Prizes

2004 Winners

Arden Prize for Poetry

The Stillness Doraine Bennett

Arden Prize for Prose

The Devil in House Brown Jake Patrick

Arden Prize for Art

Cowboy Sarah Irvin

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Dedicated to Dr. Cheryl Wharry
who will be missed dearly by all

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Her Coffee

Jason Connelly

Chapped truthful lips by five,
as we were married for coffee.

Stained rings easily cleaned by nine,
and there is still more time to be with my mistress
as the second hand tells my life.

It is turning late, and the night is beginning to make me
a wandering thinker.

I go to sip once more from my glass of routine,
when I am warmed from its contents,
as it spills past my lips and into my lap,
staining the pages I have chosen to assist me in
creating my own nude.

I pause not from the sensation, but more so the situation.
When did I get so deep?

There is never a dull moment with my mistress
and never a dull moment with my words,
and yet the two of them together are quick with wit
and cut with fear.

Fear for I am still that boy who plays with matches,

and feels with a wooden heart.

Perhaps water is what I should choose to help me with my thinking,
but still I will always choose her coffee.

For the sake of having her chapped truthful lips by five,
and her stained rings easily cleaned by nine.

At a Worn Piano in the Corner of the Room

Doraine Bennett

He worries over a diminished seventh—
He just finished his sixth, and still
Has no tonic for the melody behind his eyes.
He searches for a phrase, one to capture the face
Of the woman he followed home,
And listens to himself listen to the song
she hears across the room.
He's not convinced that he won't leave,
So he looks for a reason to stay,
Singing, "They've come to take me home,"
Like one who still wishes they would.

The Devil in House Brown

Jake Patrick

Once she had strapped herself into the driver's seat of the gray family van and her husband had closed the front door of their house, Jane fished around in her purse for the lithium carbonate derivative that her doctor deemed necessary for her euthymia. In spite of the possible risks to the baby's well-being, the apparent benefits, according to the opinions of professionals addressed, greatly outweighed the somewhat nebulous pitfalls of the drug, and so she was permitted small dosages.

Jane was two months out of her puerperal stages, and found the succeeding time to be less than glamorous. Some people speak of child birth as a phenomenon, a beautiful and beatific miracle. No more a miracle than eating food and a turd coming out of your ass, Jane had often thought. She was slowly, so slowly, approaching the weight she had been proud of prior to gestation, and while that ameliorated her emotional unrest, the stretch marks that inhere in the process didn't quite reach the status of "trophy" in her eyes, as they did with a number of her friends. No more a proud symbol of this rite of passage than the dark rings under her eyes, or the pain in her

lower back; the mood swings; the shitty diapers; the coupon-clipping for Gerber and Pampers; the 3 AM nursing; the sometimes irrepressible manic visions of her child, bloodied and lifeless; the doctor's appointments; the loneliness; the death of sodality; the sagging breasts—it was clear to Jane that such anathema was not inspired by a merciful God. However, the Browns hadn't discontinued their weekly visits to church. In fact, they still kept many a religious symbol or image about their home. These things comforted her by subtly pervading the wells of her being, though ultimately Jane was not assuaged by the good book, nor the community that surrounded it.

None of this is to insinuate that Jane did not love her child, nor that she resented her husband, but she certainly didn't rely on faith where pragmatism was called for; there simply wasn't time. In other words, the pinnacle and total consummation of her divinely recognized love for and binding to Dale had created a spiritual vacuum, because she sure as hell wasn't running to the Holy Trinity for help every time she cleaned vomit from the car seat.

Fellow mothers in the community didn't necessarily fall on the church during hard times either, but their adversity was different, Jane knew it must be. Why else would she be the only one to suffer in such a bizarre fashion, if they too were visited by the haunting visions Jane received? Therefore, when she ventured to dip her toe into the communal waters of motherhood, she did so carefully before quickly retracting. Being the only woman she knew with a Master's degree, she had felt the bitter cold of isolation since before Martin

was born, and the lessons about social interaction from then were useful now.

Her body drove to the hotel while her mind created another world to consider. The cool night passed before her eyes without much notice, and the sudden glare of a red traffic or brake light would startle her conscious mind out of its dream, knocking her momentarily from the activities she recounted, lived, in her head.

The conversation with Dale earlier, upon her departure, disturbed her. Jane didn't know it until she spoke to the receptionist at the Marriott Inn and found that her jaw was sore, but she ground her teeth when she considered what had been said.

"I'll only be gone for the night, just the night, and I'll be home first thing in the morning." It had almost been an apology.

"I know, we went over it, it's all right. You need a night off, it's all right. Martin and I will be fine. Call a friend in the morning, go get lunch. Stay out all day tomorrow if you feel like it, you've earned it."

"I know, I just feel like I shouldn't leave. What if he wakes up in the middle of the night? And what about his food? I don't know how I feel about that formula. I—I can't go, I'll just stay, I'm fine, really."

"No, baby, I can't let you deprive yourself of some rest. You need it more than you think." This Dale had said with conviction, though the smile he forced failed to mask his desperation. He wanted respite as much as she.

"What do you know about needing rest? You're not the one taking

care of Martin all day, every day. Don't condescend to me."

"Please, don't start."

"You're still doing it. Maybe I really am fine, don't you think that's possible? What if I don't need to go any-god-damn-where? Can't you, in your ego-stuffed head, allow yourself to be wrong?"

"We're not doing this, Jane. Go, I've got everything covered here."

"Okay, okay, god . . . do you know where the diapers are?"

"Of course."

"Where?"

"Jane, go."

"All right! I'm going."

"Wait: do you have your medicine?"

"Of course."

"Where?"

"I'll see you tomorrow."

Jane had turned her head after that, permitting Dale to kiss her cheek when he leaned over the threshold that separated them.

This had been her farewell for the weekend. This she repeated aloud, all of it, focusing her stare on nothingness at a distance when speaking her parts; wistful blank spaces that were filled with recollections of the encounter on the concrete veranda, real again as it had been then. Fifteen minutes in the ugly, gray block of metal passed as if the time had been captured in a retainer and strung out to exist independently of all other time. She nearly wrecked twice. Her body drove.

Jane's mind wandered. Her thoughts, fragmented from a lack of proper sleep, agitated and frightened her. She thought this was exactly why such a getaway was not only helpful, but absolutely essential to the family's health. She had at times been ashamed of inexplicable urges to hurt those she loved; terrible, selfish thoughts, she believed, that would strike her sporadically and without warning. Sometimes while washing the dishes she would enter a fugue state, wherein she became fixated upon images of Martin in a hospital bed with tubes and needles protruding from his small body; clinging to the life she had labored to give him with those excrescences which now, somehow, replaced her. That felt good. Jane also felt momentary relief with such visions, but not because she wished ill upon her child, never that. The relief lay only in the duration of that gossamer world of daydream, which may have been a minute or an hour. It was sometimes difficult to know. This was what scared her most.

More than once she'd returned from such slips into the recesses of her mind, to a finished chore. The clothes were ironed, the laundry done, or the dishes washed, all without her notice. She confided these things in no one, and with time managed to deny the phantoms in her head by force of will.

Jane arrived at the hotel, where she paid for a single-bed room situated near the pool. Passing the water and smelling the chlorine that wafted about the inner courtyard was a comfort. Sanitation without effort on my part, she thought. Similar feelings were aroused when she opened the door to the room to encounter a vacuumed carpet,

folded linens, no dust: an absence of anyone else's dependent mess. She placed her belongings on the bed with a blanket that resembled the floral department at the grocery store, then divested herself of shoes, to plop down in it. It squeaked in complaint every time weight was shifted toward an edge. Nothing was ever absolute, nothing perfect.

Jane rolled and twisted, bringing her head to the foot of the bed where her bags lay, evoking another squeak from the metal frame underneath. She opened her luggage and dredged up a pair of jeans that were rolled into a cylindrical swirl. Upon unraveling it she produced a bottle of 2002 Beringer White Zinfandel, which she promptly uncorked and walked to the sink counter just outside the restroom door with. She decanted the wine into a clear plastic cup provided by room service, then turned to return to the bed, and the first cup was empty before she sat. After ten minutes in the dark she had polished off two more of the flimsy tumblers full of wine, and suddenly was aware of how cold the room was. She rolled to the side of the bed nearest the door with another squeak, and clicked a button on the wall-unit air conditioner. Too impatient to wait for warmth, she carried the wine and cup outside, where she found a white plastic chair to recline on, adjacent to the cold, blue water. There Jane drank the rest of the bottle.

An hour later, at the bottom of the container, she began quietly crying. Though it was late, she feared the night security may find her to her embarrassment, so she lolled back to her room, fumbled

through tears with the keycard, and managed to enter the still cool lodging. Those damned wall shakers never work right, she thought.

Once inside she crumpled to the floor and continued to sob with self pity, for her state of affairs and for fear of her family's well being. As the maternal adhesive she was expected to hold fast for the sake of her family. While empowering in theory, this was actually a crippling thought. She was a good mother, truly, though encouraging words from friends and family eventually turn trite, and necessitate insecurities which can only be conquered alone, regardless of how much those who love you pray they may help. Her tears sprung from inebriation and from a deep, black abyss of sorrow. She lay curled in a fetal position for what could have been an eternity in her mind, when something that had been present all along startled her.

Jane twisted her body to look over her shoulder. The bathroom door was limbate with a faint red luminescence, and though she was drunk, she knew she hadn't used the toilet. That light shouldn't be on, and come to think of it, shouldn't be red, should it? Wiping her eyes on the cuffs of her blouse, Jane made a few attempts at standing before she was able to crutch her way up with the dresser, then the television that sat upon it. Using the wall as a guide, she slowly focused on placing one foot in front of the other, toward the bathroom, and was so tightly concentrated on keeping her balance that when she arrived at the portal she was again surprised to find the soft red light spilling from the sides of the heavy wooden door. She placed a palm to the handle, and found it warm to the touch.

Because her fear was outweighed by the more powerful combination of curiosity and alcohol, Jane twisted the metal knob and opened the door.

Facing Jane was a large bathroom, the dimensions of which seemed far too big for such a small hotel. But there it all was: that over-sized bath, the gilt bidet and toilet, dual sinks with verdigris tinged faucets in a marble counter; everything that shouldn't be in the place of the cramped porcelain and fiberglass trappings of a motel bath. But there it all was.

Standing next to the tub, from which steam rose and placating water effervesced, was a tall, lean man with a heavy patch of raven colored hair. He wore a dark suit, and though it hid the lines of his physique, and there was much steam, and she was drunk, Jane could clearly see he was virile. He was not of an ostentatious size, but his broad shoulders and squared jaw betrayed his strength. He looked at Jane solemnly and without smiling. His eyes didn't pierce through her own, rather, they occurred as pits set below and behind more prodigious features, dark depressions that one might fall into if not careful. His effect was not a comforting one.

"Wha . . . what the hell?" she slurred.

"Hmm . . . close," the man responded quietly, confidently. His voice was a light baritone. Its rumble was like an echo from the recesses of the earth that was both haunting and massaging as it escaped through the gaping mouth of a cave. It was the call of a siren of the underworld. Jane's shock and confusion forced her mind to

clear some, and her body now permitted itself independent balance as the hairs at the back of her neck stood.

"Who the fuck are you?" Jane's fists clenched and her eyes blazed, but the man raised a hand, palm forward and with his arm pulled slightly into his chest; a defensive but comforting gesture, one that pleaded for calm discourse. She began to say, "I'm calling the police," but the man motioned with his hand, making a cup of his palm, and something took hold of her mind. Jane's emotions and will to run were then wrapped in smooth, red, ethereal velvet. It mimicked the soft, anesthetizing moisture from the bath. She closed her eyes and grinned innocently, and when her eyes opened again she found that she was uncannily lucid, even if the uncanny nature of her surroundings no longer seemed so unusual.

The man explained, "I am here as a friend, Jane." And she trusted that he was. "Please, come and sit with me." And so she did.

"Jane, I have been watching you, and I am concerned. You haven't been living a healthy life, and it's wearing on you. Just look at your complexion, dear." When he said this, he reached up and brushed Jane's cheek lightly with the back of his hand which appeared calloused and thick, but was warm and comforting nonetheless. He had the demeanor of a kindly grandfather. Jane resisted the urge to sit in his lap with her head curled down onto his shoulder.

He continued, "I want you to be happy, Jane. I can make happiness a reality. Your *dreams* of felicity will not persist, if you will allow me to care for you. You will no longer desire, for all you desire will be

yours. I can show you what to do. I can be your guide, if you allow it."

Jane's eyes were glassy and drooping, the way a dog's might be if it were begging for scraps, and she dumbly nodded yes.

At this, the man showed a manic smile that was not in keeping with his dismal affect. The grin of joy was corrupted by those horrible eyes that were surrounded by crow's feet, making either socket look as if it were a hole into which something had collided, causing cracks to form about the rims. He seemed a smiling ghost, like the apparition of a man whose eyes had been burned out before dying, but could still see.

They were facing one another on the edge of the marble basin, which now, upon closer inspection, was like a precipice overlooking a vat of boiling water. He turned from her to retrieve a large, black leather-bound ledger. From Jane's vantage, the book might have manifested from nothingness, to sit in the man's thick, strong hands. He handled the volume with ease, and gently turned to an aged page somewhere in the middle, then offered it to Jane. She took it in both hands, and thought it was lighter than it appeared to be. She examined the page turned to, and noticed a plethora of names, some in English, some in languages and letters Jane couldn't read or identify. The man stood behind Jane now and provided her with a pen from over her shoulder, placing his hand on that same shoulder after she accepted. She gazed up at him in a moment of hesitation. His grin persisted.

"What is this?"

"That, Jane, will be evidence of our promise to help one another. It is a simple formality, truly, mostly a ritual to please those I love enough to take under my wing. It is also a symbol, Jane, a physical guarantee of the trust I implore you place upon me."

He motioned with his matte eyes to the book, and she signed her name there: Jane Brown. She sighed with calm.

"Very good," the man spoke. His face released its hold on that smile, and he picked the ledger up from Jane's lap to return it somewhere; again she did not see. "Now you must rest, Mrs. Brown, and you will arise in the morning to find your burdens lifted." He bent and kissed her forehead such as a father would, and Jane was weary with sudden fatigue. Then she slept.

That night Jane dreamt of pleasant things. She was again sitting next to a bath, but she was at home, on the edge of the blue-tiled shower adjoined to the room where she nightly slept with Dale. He was there, too, relaxed in a bath of quiet, still water, and his long flaxen hair floated to the top to rest on the surface. Jane was joyous at the sight of his undisturbed features; too often had his brow been furrowed in argument with her. But now his face was innocent. She reached into the cold water until her elbows were wet, and smiled as she caressed his cheeks. There were quiet, almost imperceptible scrapes along either side of Dale's neck, though he didn't stir, and must not have been in pain. She was content to see him in such calm, comfortable repose.

She felt giddy, almost as she did when she and Dale had met seven years earlier in college. He studied architectural design while she went on to receive degrees in language arts, then philosophy. Jane's intentions were to teach once she had earned a doctorate, but with her recent troubles, such was not possible. She felt that soon, however, it might be. Very soon she and Dale might return to those happier times, now with Martin, and eventually things would be right. She thanked God above for bringing them together and blessing them with such a beautiful child. It was the first time she genuinely felt positive about the future. Nothing at all mattered in that moment but the love she knew would soon connect her family with each other, and with its ambitions.

These thoughts filled Jane's mind, and again she felt the comfort of that ethereal velvet. Time does not exist in dreams as it does in our waking lives, and almost without her notice, as if it were expected naturally, there was a slow shift: she was no longer in the bathroom, but instead in front of the cobblestone fire place at the front of their home. Under the chimney burned three paper-wrapped, store-bought logs of pine that crepitated and sizzled with heated delight. The smoke danced in plumes of merriment, first spinning around the logs, then softly wafting up the flue.

In her arms lay Martin, swaddled in an azure blanket given to Jane earlier that year at his baby shower. She was again warm, warm with the heat of the flames and with her bubbling, nurturing love. She clutched Martin very tightly to her chest. Her maternal radiation was

so intense, it smothered everything but the fire. Only the happiness she currently felt for having a family she could depend on for strength and support was left. Her baby weighed heavy upon her arms and shoulders, though he did not writhe or struggle in her grip. "My beautiful baby boy," Jane cooed.

Yes, she could feel that amorous foundation being set even now, in this fantastic slumber.

Jane awoke with a start at a harsh noise and sucked in air as the cool night shocked her body. She lay prostrate on the dewy grass in front of her home, chilled especially by the damp forearms of her blouse that were slowly desiccating in the wind.

The trusses of her home had collapsed with kicking, biting flames. The middle of the roof had fallen in, manifesting a black pit in the center of the circular, flaming heap. The fire shot forth from every window, and leapt high into the heavy smoke which blackened the morning sky.

Jane stood up. Her head pounded, her vision was blurred, but she knew where she was, and she gazed with terror at the hellish congeries of burning drywall, furniture, lumber, glass, and family. Her knees wobbled, and she crashed to the ground with a hopeless shriek of despair. She stayed there on the ground until the authorities arrived too late, and cried. God does not exist here, she thought. He never did. And though the house reached temperatures to melt glass,

her skin was stippled with gooseflesh, and her blood ran cold.

*Not Alone*Marjorie Hendrix

One crystal, clear drop separates from the forever
Undulating waves of the sundown shore onto
My skin. I sit and watch as it slowly finds
The ground, sliding down the side of my body,
Leaving parts of it behind, never alone.

Gone Again

Kathy Honea

It was a Friday morning when Anna discovered her mother was gone. She walked into the kitchen rubbing her sleepy eyes and could feel the emptiness in the air.

"She's gone again," Hope, the oldest of the four girls, said to their father as she was preparing his morning coffee.

Their father just sat there upon the rusty chair, staring into his empty cup.

"Gone—everything gone again," the father repeated to the chipped cup that Hope was now filling with hot coffee.

Anna stood there in her tattered nightgown and watched Hope place the last dish into the hot soapy water.

Clack! "Ouch . . . I did it again, daddy! I broke a stupid plate. I can't do nothing right."

As Hope wrapped a paper towel around her wound, the father just sat there and stared into his cup. He didn't say anything.

Barefoot, Anna strolled happily across the sandy floor toward her father and plopped into his lap. "Daddy, you get to walk to work again . . . and I get to pull your boots off when you get home!"

Hope carefully continued to wash the dishes while she prepared the bacon and grits on the hot piping stove. She then slowly turned toward Anna and their father.

"Daddy, I'll tell my teachers that I'm sick again. They won't know the truth, daddy, honest."

"Don't you tell them a god damn thing," their father shouted. "I'm your daddy and I can take care of my kids!"

The father's stern voice awakened the other two girls from their sleep. They sluggishly walked into the kitchen and began to ask questions.

"Where's the T.V.?"

"Why's Hope cooking? Where's momma?"

"I wanna watch cartoons! Where's the T.V.?"

"I get to pull daddy's boots off when he gets home from work!" Anna bragged.

"Shut-up, you silly girl, momma took the T.V. again! Don't you know nothing?"

"That's enough, dammit! You girls get ready for school."

Anna walked up to her father while the other two fought over the small, cluttered bathroom. "Daddy, don't worry, mommy always comes back." She gave her father a kiss on the cheek and left him alone with Hope.

Their father was still sitting there, motionless. After a few minutes, he finally lifted his head and turned his dark eyes toward Hope.

"Baby, you okay staying home today?"

"Daddy, you know that kids at school give me a hard time. I'd rather stay home and take care of y'all. Besides, I'm in tenth grade now—I know everything I need to know . . . how long do you think momma'll be gone this time?"

"Who the hell knows? By God I'm sick and tired of this shit. That damn woman's gonna send me to an early grave!"

The father slowly pulled the chair away from the table and kissed Hope on the forehead. He left for work.

While the other two were getting ready for school, Anna slowly walked around the living room. *Our TV's gone; our car's gone. . . . I wonder where my mommy is. I'm glad she left my skates and my cat and my favorite Easy Bake oven.*

"Anna!" Her sister screamed. "What are you doing? Come n' eat so you can catch the bus with the others."

The four young girls sat quietly together and finished their breakfast.

"Anna, why ain't you eating your bacon?" Hope sneered.

"I'm not hungry."

"But you always eat your bacon. I went to a lot of trouble making y'all breakfast, so the least you can do is eat it."

"I said I'm not hungry," Anna numbly replied.

Hope glared at Anna. *How can kids be so ungrateful*, she thought as she turned and observed the other two. The other two were fighting again over the last slice of bacon.

"You already had two pieces!"

"So, I want another."

"Would y'all quit fighting?" Hope yelled.

Anna lowered her head and traced her plate with her favorite Barbie fork that her mother had bought at the local Goodwill. Her thoughts drifted to the times where they would all pile into their boat-sized Chevrolet and head to this store where they did most of their shopping.

"Let's go Anna!" snapped a voice.

A startled Anna and the other two left the table and slowly walked out the door toward the bus stop. Hope gathered the half-eaten breakfast and placed the leftovers in the refrigerator. She then pulled out her record player and put on her most treasured record, *The Commodores*. As she scraped the food into the garbage, she noticed a small black notebook tucked neatly behind the shelf. She curiously opened the book and observed numerous telephone numbers without any names. *Mmm . . . Must be daddy's*, she thought. She placed the book back behind the shelf and as she began to clean the dishes, she danced around the kitchen and pretended she was on stage singing before thousands of people . . . *that's why I'm easy . . . easy like Sunday morning, yeah . . .*

When Hope finished cleaning the kitchen, her thoughts turned to her mother. She walked into her own bedroom and pulled out one of the half-broken drawers of her faded wooden dresser. She scrambled through the clothes that were donated by the local church and desperately searched for her diary. She finally found the diary snuggled

between her favorite flowered blouse (the one she wore to school at least twice a week) and her old torn blue jeans. She sat on the bed and opened the rusty pages to a small torn picture—tightly stuck into the creases. Hope had torn the picture out of her mother's *Glamour* magazine just weeks before. As she thought of her mother, Hope gazed at a fabulous diamond necklace. She tightly clutched the picture in her hands and remembered her mother's exact words, "One day, I will be able to buy this necklace." Hope sat there for what seemed like hours and finally whispered to herself, *A little more time and I can get this for mom.* She had been frantically selling Coca-cola bottles for days so that she could buy this necklace her mother so admired. As she thought over the last few weeks, knots began to curl in her stomach and intense rage forced itself up through her entire body. She crumpled the picture into a ball and then tossed it into the garbage. *Yeah, right,* she mumbled as she buried her red swollen face into the pillow.

Anna sat silently on the shabby, splintered porch, watching the sand whirl in the wind on the dirt road on which they lived. Dirty and scuffed, her father's figure emerged from the dust and Anna ran toward him with open arms.

"Daddy, can I pull off your boots?"

"Hold on, baby, daddy's tired. Let me get in the door."

Her father, exhausted and distraught, walked into the living room and fell into the torn couch. He set his dirty black lunch-pail on the

scuffed floor and took in a long deep breath. Anna's sisters rushed into the living room to see who was home.

"Is momma home? Did she bring back the T.V.?"

"Nooo, it's daddy. It's not time for mommy to come home yet. And I'm pulling daddy's boots off. Right, daddy?"

Anna's father just sat there. He couldn't move. He propped his feet out in front of the couch so that little Anna would leave him alone. She happily untied the strings and loosened each boot. She then held her breath as she carefully slid the boot over each sweaty foot. Anna knew that she was helping her father when she heard a little moan of relief slip from his lips.

Two weeks had passed and Hope was in the kitchen preparing fresh collard greens that she grew herself in the back yard. She warily turned toward her father, who was finishing his last sip of beer.

"Daddy, the school called today."

"What the hell did they want?"

"Well, they said that you gotta come to school and sign some papers so I can quit."

"Damn . . . I'll do it later."

Just then Anna came crashing into the front door. "Daddy, our car's here, our car's here! Momma's here. . . . I knew she'd be back again."

Anna's half-sober father pushed his chair into the floor and raced toward the door. The four girls quickly followed behind.

"I hope it was worth it this time—I had to walk to work every

damn day, woman!"

Anna ran to her mother and threw her arms around her neck. She slowly inhaled the refreshing scent of her mother as she squeezed tightly—never intending to let go. Anna's father and her three sisters just stood in the patchy driveway, with their hands placed on their hips.

Their mother stomped over to the father. She grabbed his arm and slapped a roll of bills into his hand. "It was!" She then turned toward Hope.

With tears rolling down her cheeks, she walked over to Hope and gave her a big hug. "My, my Hope, you sure are getting to be a young woman." As Hope stared at her mother, she noticed a small diamond pendant around her neck.

They all stood there admiring the necklace and gawking over the money their father was now firmly hanging on to.

"Did you bring the T.V. back?" Anna asked.

"Shut up and let your momma come in the house. I'm sure she's tired."

Anna's father threw his arm around her mother's shoulders and they all walked into the old battered house.

"Did she bring the T.V. back?" Anna whispered.

The Monster's Lament

Chris Parker

I am made of hope, and unrequited love:
a product of dreams and human meat made
alive by subtle magics. I fear my face.
Unkempt eyes and messy cheeks echoing
across the mirror-shards that litter the floor
of my humble home. I do not bathe.
I still wear the dirt of those plundered graves.
That cold, black soil reminds me that this flesh,
the flesh of many, holds the mind of one man
and binds a soul sparked from science. And God?
God lives in the damned sun, in the torches
and shovels and rusting swords and the shouts:
"Abomination!" He also stayed, briefly,
in the mad mind of my creator. God
lingers here. He whispers such spiteful words,
as if I was his Prometheus. No.
I have stolen no flame, save the fire
that keeps these mismatched bones warm when the snows come
drifting through fire-blackened holes in the ceiling.

I smile at His distaste for the life
I was given. I will smile when he brings
the mob again. And I will be smiling
when I set this whole bloody thing aflame.
The mob, this place, my crooked face, and God—
on fire. Yes. I would burn this Frankenstein form
to the ground, for only the dream of love.

Göring in Love

Nick Norwood

He's a war hero and she's the wife of some rich guy in Sweden,
Whom she will leave and where they will continue to live
In spite of the scandal. This is before the putsch of '23
And even before they become Nazis together, all star-crossed
And tender. Their joint hatred of Jews: exquisite in its purity!
But then she dies. O the horror! Bludgeoned with grief
He spends hours weeping in their bedroom (and pay attention,
Please, because this is all true, I'm not making it up). Then, of
course,
The death camps, the Gestapo. He is merciless in her honor.
He sends people to the slaughter with a bloodthirst
That is itself a thing of beauty, O something to see!
Even after remarrying, he builds a shrine to her
In one of his bedrooms and has her body exhumed
And reinterred near his hunting lodge in a sacred ceremony
In which the Führer himself doffs his hat and bows
In reverence. Meanwhile, the death camps, yes,
And the Luftwaffe and his beloved Gestapo. And nights
When the shot of morphine is needed not only for the pain

Of the old bullet in his groin but also for the loss of her,
Love like an addiction, love that the body, the mind, the soul
Cannot learn to do without. The will to power, vermin
To the slaughter, and hurry, please, time is running out!
But throughout the Rise and Fall, the last days,
The trial in Nuremberg, right up to the final cellblock hours,
He loves her, she is with him, they remain together
As sweetly and truly perhaps as any lovers in the annals
Of, you know, human history. And so I ask you,
What is love? What is it really? Does it even exist?

First Language

Crystal Woods

Later, we speak French and English,
willing our lips to form foreign syllables:
Je suis ici en vacances. Mi perro es blanco y negro.

But first we spoke a common tongue,
a language of phonemes and slobbered pitches:
Da-Da-Da-Da Ba-BA!!

We invented onomatopoeia,
the sound the word.

Even years afterward we sometimes
forget we learned all the other.
When the bone snaps, when the mother bears down,
when the husband's chest does not rise again,
we wail in our native tongue.

The permanence of your passing
hangs between us like a locked office door,

reminding us we are all fluent in the
language of loss.

In memory of Dr. Cheryl Wharry

The House On Holloway Road

Brenda Evans

Thomaston, Georgia is my hometown. My relatives live here in abundance and they live all over the place. Growing up, I lived in about four different locations in Thomaston. Each place has its own set of unique childhood memories for me, but none of those places have memories that are as vivid as the ones on Holloway Road.

My parents, my brother Tommy and I moved to Holloway Road when I was about four years old and we lived there until I was twelve. No place I have ever lived is so permanently fixed in my memory as this old house. I can close my eyes and see the place exactly as it was then. I cherish these memories because I believe it to be the first place that I was self-aware. The house doesn't even exist anymore, for it was torn down and a new house built in the old house's place. Although the new house has some striking similarities, it is not the same. The old house was more than "just a house," it was my childhood home.

Built probably in the late 1800's or early 1900's by the Holloway family, the house was known as the Holloway home place. By the time my family moved there in 1950 or 1951, the house was in really

bad shape. There had been several renters before my family and they had not kept the place up. My father made a deal with the owners to let us move there and Daddy and Mother agreed to fix everything that was messed up.

The house was on a dirt road about two miles off a main highway, Highway 74 East of Thomaston. From the minute you left that highway and turned onto the first road, Trinity Road, you knew that this house was in "the boonies." The red dirt road curved almost immediately so as to hide the fact that you had just left a paved road. After the curve straightened out, the narrow road could be seen to stretch out in front of the car for at least a mile before it disappeared into the thick green trees. Only slightly graveled, the well-worn ruts of the dirt road were wealthy with potholes. The car bumped and crawled haphazardly along as you drove. A single old shack of a house on the right with a clean swept dirt yard was the only house on this road and the place where our childhood playmates, Louise and Melvin, lived. A single tire swing hung from the tree in the front yard. Their sweet mother, Frankie, was our maid and babysitter for years.

Down a little hill to a tiny bridge only wide enough for one car to cross at a time, a little stream of water lazily appeared out of the trees and bushes on the left. It disappeared for only a moment under the little bridge, then rambled its way off to the right. A hard rain would always flood this little bridge and we would still drive across it but very carefully. I used to like to look out the car window and down at

the muddy water up high on the car tires as we treaded across. There were always little snakes, frogs and lizards floating in that flood water.

A large open field full of cows in the distance and a rather bald hill stood against a backdrop of dark, deep woods far on the right of the stream. One day as we headed for home, my father suddenly stopped. Up on that bald hill were several large brown calves. At first I didn't know what I was looking for but Daddy finally made me see a huge eagle that stood right beside one of those calves. What a big bird! Its head was as high as the calves! My Dad died in 1989, so I can safely tell you that we hurried home and returned with my Dad's rifle and he shot at the eagle and missed! The way that huge bird lifted off the ground with such an effortless leap, flapped its enormous wings, circled and flew away was a beautiful sight.

The road started up a slow hill and another odd looking attraction on the right came into view, a pile of sawdust about two stories high. Out of the top of the pile stuck a pole with cross slats to mark how many feet high the pile of sawdust became. Around the bottom of the pile, vines had started to grow and the deep golden brown color of the sawdust was evidence that it had been there a long time. That sawdust pile used to show up in all my elementary school drawings. I thought it was fascinating.

On the side of the hill the road suddenly came to a stop sign. A left hand turn onto Holloway road and the house immediately came into view at the top of the hill. It was evident that the house had been the hub of a large farm at one time by the way the grounds and

buildings were laid out. All around the house was acres of open field. A right hand turn off Holloway Road into the house's driveway with large pecan and oak trees on both sides revealed an expansive, shady yard. In the driveway the front yard, the house and backyard were on the right and on the left of the driveway, one of Mother's ten-foot-wide flower beds full of every blooming flower in Georgia extended from the road to the first of two old barns. At the first of that flower bed was where we buried Lady our Collie dog when a neighbor ran over her and broke her back one night. She had tried to get up all night and had made a deep circle in the soft dirt of the road. Daddy found her the next morning when he started for work and took her to the vet but there was nothing the vet could do for her. We children were allowed to say goodbye and the story goes that the vet had to give her three times the normal lethal dose to put her down. She loved my family. Once she knocked down and stood on an insurance man because he ignored her barks as she stood between us three children playing on the porch and his approach. Mama had to rescue him!

Further down the left and next to the first old barn on the left was Mother's flower bed for cut flowers. Zinnias, roses, bachelor buttons and any flower that could be cut and brought inside were in this flower bed. This is where I didn't see the longest snake I had ever seen was! The flower bed was about twenty five feet long and as I cut zinnias to take inside—the flower bushes began to shake and move. There was a barbed wire fence along the whole length of the backside of this bed that separated the flowers from the open field beyond. I

never saw that snake, but the bushes moved along the entire length of that fence. The movement was fuel for the imagination of an eight year old and I ran—screaming.

The driveway continued straight past the backyard of the house on the right and the two small old barns on the left to an open field and the biggest hay barn I had ever seen. It was in this barn that my brother, sister and I climbed about twenty feet up into the hayloft and jumped out. As we jumped we screamed, "It's a bird, it's a plane, it's Superman!" One of those times as I hit the pile of soft hay at the bottom of the barn, my knee flew up and hit me in the jaw and fractured it.

The yard all around the house was lower than the driveway and bordered on the driveway side with a two feet high wall made out of huge rocks. The house was not underpinned the way houses are today. That just means that you could see completely under the house and as a little child I had crawled easily under it many times. The chimney was also made out of rocks. This was the place that Santa Claus had stopped his reindeer and sleigh one Christmas Eve. Christmas day we children could plainly see where the eight reindeer had pawed the ground and where the sleigh had slid to a stop on the dirt right beside the chimney. Inside there were black sooty foot prints coming out of the fireplace and leading to the Christmas tree!

The house itself was magnificent! The wood on the outside had aged to a dark grey. A huge porch expanded the entire front of the

house. The front door with two small side windows stood dead center. The steps were the steps that my little brother Tommy ran down and off the porch in a stroller and knocked himself out. My mother, in a state of panic when she found him not breathing, had run around the house with him limp in her arms screaming for my father. She was so hysterical that my father had to slap her so that she would turn my little brother loose. Daddy quickly revived him.

At the right far side of the porch was where the swing hung. Once my little sister Cherry and Daddy swang so high that they flipped over backwards and off the porch into the flower bed!

Walking into the front door into a large hallway, one could go left or right into two extremely large rooms. Twelve-foot-high ceilings and eight-foot-high windows with light painted walls gave these rooms an open air feeling of a huge space. In the left room, which is the place I first saw and named my baby sister Cherry after her birth and where I peeked out from under my bandage to watch the Lone Ranger on T.V. when I had pink eye infection, there were double glass doors that opened into the next room. This room was not as big as the first but had the same size windows. The walls were naturally stained wood and made the room dark even with all the lights on. That darkness was comfortable the time I pulled the kitchen cupboard down and broke all my mother's dishes while she was away. I curled up in a little ball on the bed and waited for her to return in that room.

This room led straight into the big bright kitchen. It was the cor-

ner of the back of the house on the left side and had four large windows. In one corner was a corner closet with a homemade wooden door and wooden latch. This was the closet that another maid locked me in one day after Daddy had left the house from having his lunch. As I beat on the door in the dark, afraid and hopeless, it suddenly opened! It was Daddy! He had a habit of removing his watch and wedding band so that he could wash off all the dirt he got on him as a carpenter before he ate lunch each day. This day he had forgotten to get his watch and ring before he went back to work and returned to find me locked in the closet. Daddy fired the maid but not before he tossed her out the back door! He stayed with us children until Mama got home.

The whole kitchen was painted a light green, even the counters were light green. The water bucket with a dipper sat on these counters after the water was freshly drawn from the shallow well outside. The bucket of water is where the mouse fell in and drowned and I dipped him up when I went to get a drink.

The kitchen opened up onto a large screened-in porch. A rather large snake once crawled in on the porch floor and made himself at home. On abruptly discovering the snake, Frankie, who later became our maid and babysitter and stayed with my brother, sister and me while Mother and Daddy worked, shut the kitchen door to protect us. She then went around the house to the back screen door and threw rocks at the snake until she killed him. Mother and Daddy laughed at how high the pile of rocks was on top of the snake!

Now back to the front of the house, in the front hall again and this time we will turn right into the other big room that was the living room with Mama's red curtains on those big windows. This is where my puppy, Friskey, would sleep in my felt bedroom shoe while I watched our black and white T.V. and where my Daddy laughed so hard at the Three Stooges. This room is also where Mama would unpack those big Sears-Roebuck mail-order boxes with all our school clothes each year. One year I got black patent shoes with a single little strap and flowers on them.

A small bedroom that was my brother's and mine before my sister was born was behind this room. Another room that used to be the kitchen before Daddy changed it was right behind that room. This little room was where we hurried in from the drive-in movies one night to get some of Mama's leftover fried chicken, covered on the table. When Daddy pulled the cloth off the plate of chicken, a mouse grinned up at him and jumped off the table. Daddy smashed the little mouse with his big foot and the gush went all over Mama's leg!

The side door of this room went out to the back porch by the kitchen. Outside the screened porch was a small open porch where I stepped on a huge bumble bee and it stung the bottom of my foot. On these steps, another time, is where I was sitting when the other maid accidentally dropped a kettle of boiling water on my legs and feet and burned me severely. I had to lie in bed with a straight chair

to hold the covers off my burns for weeks.

Down the porch steps and to the left was the well where we drew up our water. The two huge oak trees behind the well was where Daddy robbed the honey bees in his bee-robbing outfit. He looked like a man from the jungle with his safari hat wrapped in netting and climbing a ladder up the tree. This is also where Mama worked so hard at washing our clothes. When Mama first got the new wringer-type washer, my little brother got his arm rolled up in the wringer all the way to his shoulder and Mama had to save him!

Yes, the images and stories are forever burned into my memory, and my memory is the only place now that this house exists. The stories are many and the love expressed and experienced in that house will forever remain with me. I love to remember this place.

Green Eyes

Melanie Greenwood

There's a beauty in her eyes.

At a distance,

Over the horizon's hill.

It's reachable.

*The Lady's Response to Mr. J. Alfred Prufrock*Jennifer Roach

Let you go then, but not with me,
to swim with your mermaids in your beloved sea
like a mental patient released too soon.

I have no interest in cold dank streets,
no intention to listen to your muttering retreats,
or your philosophizing beneath the moon.

And to your question, which you dread to pose,
while you push your glasses back up your nose,
I must politely decline.

For I meant to tell you I fancied you once,
until you wrote a poem that went on for months.
Now it's time you abandon your rhymes.

The truth is, that is what I meant,
and we weren't talking of Michelangelo.

It wasn't what you thought at all,
not at all.

We were speaking of chandeliers,

and I thought of the way their light
always lit your face,
yes, your aging face,
yet beautiful all the same.
But I saw you at the foot of the
stairs, staring at my words,
with your fading eyes
and your scribbling pen,
trapped by your own self-pity.

My dear, we never noticed the
balding spot, until you
pointed it out.

*The Night Life*Kathy Honea

They move their bodies
round and round,
searching for insatiable solutions.
Not one comprehends the
contentious power
of the demons that drive
deeper and deeper.
The lust will leave
them breathless—
unless resistance
reveals itself
and saves their
hearts of hatred.

*Isis*Crystal Woods

Still, I dream of hands.

His right one gestures as the bus pulls away,

my sleepy boy waving through misty glass.

Who knew it was really goodbye?

The bus bleeds into yellow FBI slickers

turning to me with the news. Beyond the police

and creek banks he sleeps face-down just under the

water, a shiny film between us. The current

stirs his arms but he

doesn't wave. I

wake before they

tell me

why.

8 a.m. at the Rescue Center, a whole day
before sleep. The copier's rhythms, the voices,

the steaming mugs of tea are comforts,
but eventually the parents arrive.

The Millers come by at ten. The mother's blue eyes
soften out of focus as her mind sweeps the country, the
world, for her daughter: what room, what van, what
closet is she in right now?

I speak—without inflection—of leads, of hope.
The father looks past me as I talk. His wife
sobs quietly but he never turns to her. They leave
single file, each rigid in their separate griefs.

At four, Ms. Bryce arrives with six-year-old Scott,
missing three days and rescued from a shed in Tulsa.
From his mother's lap he searches me with steady eyes
and looks so much like him that my chest tightens.

"We brought you these." The woman gives me
two small shapes cut from paper, thanks me, and leaves
with her child. I tape the shapes on the wall behind me,
near the others that flutter and curl. Reaching for me fifty fold
are his hands.

Prayer of a White Boy

Chris Parker

Lord. Couldn't I be black, or gay?
Black and gay, perhaps. I have no
mystery in this pale-suburban skin.
Make me a smooth, sweet chocolate,
dark and so deep it colors my blood.
I would love men for words. For the
simple joy of filled pages, well-dressed
and oppressed for being me. These are
all things moving ink.
I, however, do not.

*Piggy*Brandon Marsh

Deep and dark, here I am stuck in this room. A cubicle of a space specially made for and by me, now occupied by ten others. The radio bzzt-bzzt's in and out, no contact with the outside world.

I have my house plasticized and duct-taped, my water bottled and my gas-masks masked. I live in America, I live in fear, and the terrorists have won. I do not live on the west coast, I do not live on the east coast. I do not live in New York, I do not live in Los Angeles; I do not live in a big city. I live in fear, I live in America, I live in a basement bunker with 10 other people, and the terrorists have won.

The alert was orange, I think it's red now, I'm not too sure what the colors are; all I see is black. "High" was all I saw before I rushed out to the local Home Depot. I beat everyone there. Some say I'm crazy for doing so, some say I'm a coward, some say I overreacted. I would say I was being prepared, cautious, and safe. I am the ant and they are the grasshopper.

My neighbors are grasshoppers too; annoying, mooching grasshoppers. I always knew they were. I should never have told them about my secret; big mistake on me.

I have enough oxygen for me to breathe for a year's time. I have two gas masks, for me and my hopeful love who never came in time. I

have enough bottled water to last a lifetime (but lifetime in this case is extremely relative as it could end any time soon). And though by all appearances I have everything covered, I do not have a gun for my neighbors' heads.

I knew I had forgotten something.

Bzzt-bzzt goes the radio. Fragments of words static in and out.

"Thi . . . n . . . ne . . . overnme . . . bzzzzzzzt. . . ." The batteries are almost gone, and I've no power. The electric bill still lies on the table, upstairs and in the kitchen. My canned food: baked beans, raviolis, meat stew, spaghetti and such. Good eating but the eating's gone. The neighbors, nameless and faceless locusts have devoured the rations; their children were especially keen on the cold and watery apple sauce.

Trapped below my bathroom, we've sat in wait for nearly three months. I hadn't thought this out much when the obsession began two weeks prior. I quit my job at the airline and took all my life savings and invested in shovels, buckets, jackhammers and the like. Some people say I'm crazy, the government claims there's nothing for me to worry about, I say there is and I say I'm just being prepared. There is nothing left of the savings, and there is nothing left of the food. There is only one option left to us.

We must revert to cannibalism.

"I pick the child!" "The hell you do! You'll pick mine!" "You're right! I will! And I call the legs!" "You sick bastard! That's my son!" "Yeah well you're son's a fat, greedy, little shit!" "Don't you get into

this!" "It's true! He sucked up all the food!" "The key to survival is to take out the fattest one!" "He's right, ya know. . . ." "He's a growing boy!" "No, he's my goddamn supper!" And so the conversation ends.

The flashlight clicks on; risky move, the batteries are all gone. Flashlight is a loose term, it's more of a spotlight. With the cubicle of a room lighted up, I give chase. I never knew the fat little prick could move so fast. Squealing in fear and ducking under legs and chairs, he escapes me. Running is quite a surprise for me, as I thought he might roll a little better.

BAM! goes the shovel and the fat little fuck is out. Click! goes the spotlight and the room is dark. I am joined by eight others in our full course meal of pigskin, pig's feet, liver and onions. Haggis was desert. You could taste the Chef Boyardee and TV dinners like a new flavor of ice cream. Though not appetizing at all, it filled us full. They say I'm sick, they say I'm going to Hell, and they say I'm going to die. I say I'm hungry, I say I'm full, and I say I'm surviving.

Bzzt-bzzt goes the radio. Time glowing red is the only light we see, static the only sound. Voices bzzt in and out. "Move the antenna," someone suggests. The natural antenna mover person I am, I find the best connection. "For those . . . ust tuning in, this is the EBS: Emer . . . cy Broadcast Sys. . . . The panic-stricken citizens of America, who have hidden themselves in their hom . . . unkers—" "I think that's us, guys." "—are advised by this Government Issued statement claiming, 'There is not, and never was, a cause for alarm. All warnings of inevitable disaster have been false alarms and, in some cas . . . est the

EBS. I repeat, all warnings of inevitable disaster have false alarms and, in some cases, drills in order to test the . . . apologize for any inconvenience these tests may have caused you. Thank you, and God bless."

*Walk Softly Now*John A. Phillips

Walk softly now soldier for a tiny dancer lie between
your sheets. Each step careful, for she'll blow if you miss
judge your feet. Her skin smooth and deadly and firm
covered in silk from hip to lip. She want come with
hard metal hands, soft kisses and precious and precise
and firm pressure release her heavens end. All melts
away with extraordinary heat, waves of cascading
deletes, till it's all gone. Flushed from eye to trigger
washed out of all life's vigor. Arching case, hard back she
lifts up and sways, intoxicating and deadly musk
through the air pulling the shanks from boots the roots
of ecstasy torn moaning and moaning. I can't help the
way she's made you feel.

Into the Forest

Nick Norwood

Adolph von Schomburg, an amateur historian

If poetry is an act of recovery, and drama just a way
Of staging what it is we would not care to lose,
Let us give in to the operatic impulse. Note how,
In autumn, the forest is so extravagant in its dying,
How it gives us its all, how every leaf becomes an actor
Who has waited his entire career to deliver this scene.
Who knows but that he might have survived the dark cave
Of winter had he resolved to be more conservative. We may
Find in the end we have nothing to build but our legacy.
Let it be grand. Let them analyze until they are sick with envy
The ingenious ways we composed our destruction, how we left
In our wake a forest path strewn with our delicate remains.

*Newcomer*Chris Parker

I.

He transferred from some Yankee college in the middle of the semester. New Jersey, New York . . . something with a "new" in the beginning. None of the things that should have mattered were the things we first noticed. Not the hard purple welts crossing his arms. Not the stylized portrait of Jesus on the front of his t-shirt, nor the well-walked in Nike's on his feet. Not his eyes, either, weighed down with sleepless bags, and brimming with a wise, searching sort of sadness. Not his unkempt black hair, circling his head like a halo. We should have noticed all of these things and more, but, being human, our eyes were drawn to the most trivial, most insignificant aspect of our new arrival to West Middle Georgia College of Arts and Letters.

Seeing as how we were all scurrying back and forth between our classes, smoking our cigarettes, and generally lounging in the mid-morning haze of heat and oppressive humidity, his moment of arrival was ozone-laden thunder in the fresh air before a thunderstorm. Conversation ebbed away, the tide of speech pushed to silence by this man's pure gravitational force. New folks in our town are always a source of conversation and speculation. New folks who can fly

require a moment of stunned silence. Now, among us, he simply levitated a few inches off the ground, gliding into our midst with the effortless motivation of thought.

-Thanks for the welcome, guys. I'm looking forward to getting an education with you.

The sarcasm in his introduction was expressive and dripping, but the music in his voice soothed us of his irony; a pack of wild beasts lulled with lyre and flute.

-Name's Ben. Ben Lever. Hey.

That introduction was the force separating him from the ground, and his shoes touched the earth with an audible sigh as he sank to the bench behind him, staring blankly out into the cloudless blue sky. For a moment, this young man was our axis of rotation.

II.

The first week Ben was with us, he was an alien we studied from afar, scientists watching over some grand social experiment: the introduction of the impossibly strange into the striking mundane. Us, we, the milling mass of humanity that is the grand we, studying, or daring to study, that which we do not understand. An outsider in our midst shedding light on things we keep dark out of necessity. We found it no crime up to this point, bashing our heads into walls for the release of blissful ignorance.

We wanted to talk to him, to get to know him.

-Ben? We'd ask, we'd implore for more than a name.

-Wouldn't you like to go Greek?

-Ben, what's it like where you came from?

-What's your classification?

-North's a little colder than it is here, colder up there, right?

-What's your major?

-Your old school was a li'l bigger'n us, I'd imagine.

-Join Student Government, Ben. Make a difference here at Dubbya-em-gee-cee.

Many heads speaking many words with one voice.

Nothing about his uniqueness. We were, in truth, scared to ask about that flight. And our queries were always met with such simple and poignant apprehension, that our advances faded away, and we became content just watching him fly.

We watched his bruised eyes slowly gain the sleep they needed, fading to a handsome blue. We watched the welts turn to yellowed bruises, and finally into smooth, strong, bronze skin. But most of all, above all else, we watched him fly. He flew into school in the morning, dropping out of the sky, a huge bird. His feet rarely touched the ground, floating to and from his classes, and we wondered why his shoes were so worn through. Amazing and unbelievable, and yet before our very eyes and occurring. Our dreams were filled with clouds and the roaring of the wind through our ears. We knew desire, and our hearts sought places other than the tiny place we called home.

By the second week, our curiosity got the best of us. We would

walk behind him, leave our hair unkempt and windblown. Hoping. Dreaming. Wishing. There had been a silence between him and us, as though the subject of his ability were taboo. Our curiosity would get the best of him, too.

-Teach us. How do you fly like that?

We saw him smile eagerness. Perhaps, he must have thought in that moment, perhaps this time things will be different. Perhaps this time, there is enlightenment to be found. A simple, striving mind, making assumptions about the definition of complexity.

-You wanna fall through blue skies alongside me? To feel the freedom of flight. Yes, of course. Of course I'll teach you.

III.

The Philosophy of Flight 1101, CRN 86508, MWF 1:00 - 1:50. We all signed up for it. There was no seat limit, no book. It met outside. He was waiting for all of us, cross-legged and on the lawn. We gathered around him, mimicking his Indian style, closing our eyes with faux understanding.

-First, first, first. What is first? Ah, yes. You think I make my skyward movements because I am able to make those movements. No, this is wrong. This is the source of your grounding. Flight is a conscious decision.

-You glare in the face of Newton's shiny red apple; how is it a conscious decision? We asked him, turning our faces to falling leaves and to the cruelty of the ground.

-Gravity, yes, good. Gravity is there, right? You say gravity makes you fall to the earth. I say the direction of a fall is a choice you make. Up, down, leftways, rightways, they are all ways. Ways to go and ways to come. A million, billion, infinity choices there to be made. This is the substance of flight. Choice. Free will. Don't get trapped in the lie that is cause and effect. Choice is yours. Choice is everything.

Saying things like that. Things about choice and free will, understandings about the universe we'd never been allowed to have. Faces upturned, we desired sky. We pined away in those moments he spoke to us that day.

-This is the end of our first lesson. We begin again on Wednesday. Same time, same place.

The next two class meetings were much more difficult. He had us in rows and columns, a fleshy grid, points on a mathematical interpretation of humanity.

-No, no. I see you jumping. My students, understand. Please. Flight isn't in the muscles of your legs. You cannot flap your arms and expect to lose the ground. These things are impossible. Our flight is one of enlightenment, one of philosophy. Voltaire paved the way for you. Think! Think, and you will be.

Our brains, unfortunately, were not used to this sort of exercise. Credits and transfers, the mumbling moving of majors. We were statistics, ants marching.

Things went very badly on Friday. It wasn't even time for class yet, and the morning gray still obscured the sun, left us with the damp

morning heat. A screaming voice we'd never heard before, female, issued from the top of the tallest building on campus. It was a sound forming no words, just the outward expression of confusion.

Heads turning all at once, the female body, separate from the group body, tossed itself off that building. Tossed itself into the air on the muscles of its legs. Time was dipped lightly in the molasses of tragedy, and we watched her plummet to the earth in slow motion, frame by frame. She landed at our feet, eyes glazing over, a slow trickle of red life dully sliding out of her nose, mouth. She stopped breathing. She died.

Ben came rushing out of a building, horror on his face. He dropped to his knees in the damp green grass beside the fallen form. He closed her eyes with a soft hand, wiped her blood away with a corner of his shirt. Our eyes left the body. Our eyes focused on him. The largest, raging forest fires are caused by tiny, small sparks. By too much heat in the air.

Ben understood the nature of the beast. There was no lyre for him now.

-She jumped. She tried to fly with her legs. I told you, I told you... oh God, she's dead.

The girl, broken appendage, was the focus of our attention. We did not hear them. We never noticed things that mattered, like streams of tears.

-I told you, flight was choice, conscious choice. You can't fly like she did. Oh, Lord.

No. That would not pacify us now. Philosophy would not bring those haunting dreams to life. It would not unbreak a girl. We would not be happy, not without this gift the newcomer had. It simply wasn't fair. We told Ben this, and he released a great sigh. Something of that sadness crept into his clear (cloudless) blue eyes. How horrible it is to know now, that this was the real lesson.

-You don't understand. We all fall, we are all falling. One simply comes to realize this. She could not realize this. We weren't ready for this. Ben's eyes searched us for compassion, help, aid.

The group, however, had none. We? WE? How dare this armchair philosopher, this Yankee, this outsider absorb himself into Us. No. We were all copies of each other. We were all normal. He was apart, this new person. And it was unfair, if he wanted to be like us, to keep his gift away. We became angry. Angry in the way one can feel, vibrating palpably off of us like a humming nest of bees. Pleading crept into his voice.

-I can't teach you this. It isn't a gift, not an ability. I have merely come to understand certain things about the nature of—

They decided then, that enough was enough. Ben could feel their decision. It was something one could see in his eyes. A sort of angry realization. And recognition, of things that have happened to him a hundred, thousand times before. These things one could see, in those (cloudless) blue eyes.

-Please! I have done nothing to you!

-You have done nothing for us either!

All they wanted was their pound of flesh. They would have it. The first stone came from somewhere in the crowd. A small rock lifted from the score of them lying uselessly around the little smoking place they call Asylum. It made a sharp crack and ricocheted off of Ben's forehead, leaving an ugly mark that began to slowly bleed.

It was enough. Their arms, in unison, began the merciless tossing of earth. They would ground and paralyze this man from the clouds. He would bleed until his blood was one with the earth. Then the pain and humiliation of their stupidity would be relieved.

Bleeding and broken, and before they could kill him, Ben fell into the cloudless blue sky and left us to our little town.

Slowly, as it was between classes, they began to break off into their usual groups, talking their usual chatter.

I stood apart, and wept. I wept for lost dreams, and I wept for nothing gained.

*Knights of Old: In Mad Ludwig's Castle*Joseph Francavilla

I

The grail is always to be sought for,
Paradise is always to be regained,
Castles dimly in sight,
yet surrounded by moats
and just out of reach.

The Golden Age of an age
is the misremembered ancient heroes,
the perfect statue of St. George and the dragon
that never really existed.

The Golden Age of a person
is thirteen—the beginning
of wild, adolescent dreams
before mature, dull realities intervene.

All our lives we madly quest,
trying to recapture

that false image of what never was
with desperate, infinite longing for
what we wish it could have been.

II

I waited for you
in King Ludwig's Neuschwanstein Castle
behind the purple ropes separating
wall-sized paintings of Wagnerian knights
from the automatic, flashless cameras of our tourgroup.

We had admired the tall thin turrets
that climbed the clouds
but could never imagine what was inside
as we climbed the hundreds of steps.

Your boyhood dreams of
life-sized Camelot graced the palace walls;
on tapestries and stone lived
the mythic knights and legends of old
that inspired N. C. Wyeth and Wagner—
and Disney.

*Roots**Molly Touchton*

It took forever to get there; the car ride was interminable, especially for a four year old. The vinyl car seat stuck to the back of my sweaty little thighs while a trickle of perspiration glued my hot pink tank top to my back. I rode in the front seat, my nose pressed to the glass while trees and trees and more trees streaked by, a whirl of dark green and brown. A field or two of grazing cattle ("Look, Daddy! Cows!") occasionally changed up the scenery. Horses galloped, their manes flying in the wind. I had never seen real cows and horses before, nor seen so much green.

The embankments were on either side of our road, steep, looming red clay walls with brazen weeds and brown grass clinging grimly to life beneath the heavy handed sun. They were ominous in the way sentinels are supposed to be. I felt like I was entering a tunnel, although by no means did those conscientious sentries block the long rays of hot sun beating down on me through the window. After a few yards, the sentinels had discharged their duties and sloped into more forgiving terrain—Farmer Joe's fields to the right, trees growing against his barbed wire fence, thick and lusciously green, and on the

left, uncontained, uncontrolled wilderness. Even then, I thought this must have been what paradise looked like to Adam and Eve.

Around the curve was our new palace. It was the biggest house I had ever seen, larger even than the White Elephants on Post. It was tall and grey, sitting wide and large in the verdant lawn, the height of whose grass boggled my Army-brat-lived-on-Post-all-my-life mind. The barn—just like on TV!—was a faded and splotchy red. My mother was already there, walking through the house with Andy perched on her hip. The car stopped. My brother John and I took off at a run. The tall grass whipped around our calves, alternately scratching and tickling us. I fell, but who could notice a slow trickle of blood on the knee when a mid-August haze hung in the field that was now my backyard, and further up against the tree line. As an adult, when I see that haze, it makes me think of fairies and the wonder I felt as a child in love with her family and her life.

I skipped back toward the house. Men and women were everywhere, some digging holes for a fence, others carrying plywood up the stone stairs, disappearing into the swallowing darkness of my new home. John went to find my father—“Are there snakes here?”—excitement and wariness competing in his eyes. I followed the glistening, tanned men with plywood, eyes alert (were I then a dog, my ears would have been perked at their most perky) for every nuance of color and shade. Dust motes danced golden in the sunlight and the ripe, familiar sound of men cursing filled my ears as I stepped

through the door into the unknown, unexplored land. My eyes were unaccustomed to the dimness. Instant shadow. There were no overhead lights, and the room was long, two rooms really, and about half the size of my house on Ft. Benning. The windows on the far right were tall and bare, but their mystical light could not compete with shadows or the ceilings. I had never seen ceilings so high or smelled quite that rich perfume—except for maybe at church.

No, exactly like at church.

My sister took me and showed me our room. We talked, or rather she talked and I listened, as she made plans about where we would put all our treasures. Our beds were already in there, bunk beds stacked against the far wall. The room echoed when we talked, but she could not hold my attention long; soon I was running away from her. I had to explore!

I found my mother in the front hall directing traffic, and I ran halfway up those beautiful blonde pine stairs before her laughing voice stopped me. Andrew was still on her hip, a warm cherry Kool-Aid cooler clutched in his little two year old hand. There was a drop of that bright red juice hanging from his straw, and as Mama shifted him, the drop shook loose and jumped to the sky blue painted floor ("That paint will have to go. Who in their right mind would paint over hard wood!" she would later exclaim, determinedly placing two economy-size bottles of turpentine in our cart at a hardware store.). "Do you love it?" she asked me. I nodded emphatically, having no words to describe the feelings of wonder and awe brimming in me.

That house is still my childhood dream. I have since moved to Columbus to be closer to school, but in the wee hours of morning I sometimes wake, wondering why I am not at home, and I long for familiar lace curtains and the call of the whippoorwill outside my windows in the grape arbor. I drive home every Sunday for Mass, and the joy I find in structured worship is only magnified by the spiritual awakening I have every time I turn my car onto that long-beloved road that rises, rises, rises, then dips down past the cows and bottoms over a tiny spring, the rich foliage barely contained to their trees as the wild birds throw their hearts at the sky in song. As I round the curve that brings me home, the barn peeks out from behind a tree that has elephant ear leaves. Nothing has meant security and peace to me more than my parents' house. Although it has seen trials and tragedy, oceans of tears, I feel as if it has always welcomed me. Far away from the hustle and bustle of the city, it has protected me.

There was a time I resented my house, and my parents, for making me be so far from "life," so far from my friends and boyfriends and the mall and the movies. I felt like my life would be better if I were nearer to Columbus and nearer the parties. I was always the first to leave whatever get-together that was going on because I had a curfew and a forty-minute drive to look forward to.

I don't know when the realization happened. I don't know when it occurred to me none of my friends had deer eating clover in their backyards, with fawns prancing in the dusky mist, or that nobody I

knew had ever found a rabbit hole teeming with baby bunnies, or had ten dogs all at once, or had rescued puppies from the county dump. I had what other people dreamed of. I still possessed exactly what had made me so happy about moving out there in the first place. I had forgotten that childhood joy of existing in harmony with nature. I forgot. But now I remember. I remember and I love and I live.

My house, the surrounding lakes and forests and animals, are all in me now; they belong to me as much as I belong to them. No matter where I go or who I grow up to be, the curve of the road, the flowered magnolia tree in my front yard, the tire swing my father hung in the back—these will always be with me. I visit them in my mind often, and I can always return to the childhood wonder of my first visit, see the fairy mist against the trees and pretend I am only four, carefree and in love with my life and my family, our home and our land.

Lost Scents

Doraine Bennett

The smell of butter rum
Will not take her back, though it should,
To a high-ceilinged room
On Ponce de Leon Avenue.

It should take her back. It should
Let her relive summertime
On Ponce de Leon Avenue
When sirens were but a sound in the night,

Let her relive the summertime
Of strawberry pie and apple peels
When sirens were but a sound in the night
And she was safe under handmade quilts.

Strawberry pie and apple peels,
Glass doorknobs, cedar trunks, jasmine vines
And she, safe under handmade quilts,

Watching lights play through Venetian blinds.

But, glass doorknobs, cedar trunks, jasmine vines
Lie tangled in a web of silk threads,
And no one watches lights play through Venetian blinds.
She stares instead at faded walls and regrets

The tangled web. Silk threads
She stitched in time unravel in her hands.
She stares. Instead of faded walls and regrets,
She dreams an old romance. Memories,

Stitched in time, unraveled in her hands,
Linger in a high-ceilinged room.
She dreams an old romance, straining to remember
The smell of butter rum.

On Green Gingham

Doraine Bennett

It was the voice I recognized first. Standing at the counter of a local shoe store, I turned to the elderly couple completing their purchase at the register next to me. The man glanced up. As a former weatherman for a local TV channel, he had one of the most recognized faces in the valley. It was still recognizable, though age had weathered it like the storms he predicted for so many years. He smiled at me without recognition. It was his wife, however, that I focused on.

"I know you!" I said. "You made an apron for me in third grade. It was green gingham with an apple on the pocket and a ruffle around the edge."

She looked at me for a moment and smiled as recognition dawned across three decades. She has a good memory, probably better than mine. I don't remember a single Sunday School lesson she taught in that third grade class, but I remember that green gingham apron. And I remember the gentle voice that was still soothing, even at 80.

"Do you still wear it or do you have it put away?" she asked me.

"It's put away," I replied and went on to talk about other things.

It was a lie. I didn't have the heart to tell her that I had hung onto

it for years, but with moving from house to house and adding child to child, somewhere in the progress of life the apron had slipped from my fingers, landed in a child's toy box, and then disappeared. As I thought about it later, I was surprised that she assumed the apron would still exist after thirty years. But she grew up in my mother's generation when things were crafted to last. I wonder if she knew, when she made those aprons for the little girls of her class, that she was sewing thoughtfulness into the fabric of their lives—though the gingham would fade, the love that stitched a small act of kindness would remain folded between layers of tissue paper, laid carefully in a chest of memories, to be pulled out from time to time and remind us of the significance of the little things.

Way Up Yonder

Hope Lehman

Shoving in my favorite pair of GAP blue jeans, I zipped up my bag, ran out the door, and hastily threw all my summer vacation gear in the van. Money, check. Pillow, check. Clean socks and underwear, check. Toothbrush, cell phone, and Michelle Branch CD, check. I was well on my way to Jersey with my best friend, Tracey, and her family. Only the open road ahead of us. "You're going to love Jersey. It's the home of diners, good radio stations, and tax free shopping," Tracey assured me as we hit I-185. Keeping this in mind, I had more than enough time to think about what her hometown would be like during the fourteen-hour drive from Columbus to Woodbury. I had never been farther north than Kentucky in my life, so I was unaware of Northern customs and lifestyles and places like White Castle, Wa-Wa, and surf malls with built in amusement parks. No Waffle House, no barbeque pits, and certainly no Southernisms like "y'all, yonder, and holler." Talk about culture shock.

Jersey's a lot different from Georgia. For one, people don't have jacked up pick-up trucks with FORD RACING tattooed on the front windshield. People mostly drive minivans, cars, and SUV's; pick-ups just aren't as popular. And traffic? Can somebody please pass me a

blindfold and a cigarette? Traffic is absolutely horrible; Atlanta has nothing on rush hour in Jersey. You could literally drive down a highway in Jersey and see more wrecks in one day than you would in an entire month in Atlanta. So be sure to bring your favorite CD to play in the car, because you will be in traffic for at least an hour longer than expected. In addition to traffic, they don't have left-hand turning lanes, nor can you turn right on red. Instead, they have jug handles and traffic circles. Shouldn't it be every American's right to turn right on red? It's pointless circles and turns of absolute madness if you ask me. And much like Georgia drivers can't stand Alabamian recluses on the road, Jersey drivers despise pushy "Pennsy" (i.e. Pennsylvania) drivers. In fact, I thought it to be rather funny when Tracey's mom transformed into a cantankerous Jersey driver as she honked her horn and had no problem visually and verbally insulting others as we crossed the state line. Nothing like a good ol' Jersey traffic jam to make you feel right at home.

But aggressive driving isn't the only thing that Jersey has to offer. Like Tracey said, they have diners, good radio stations, and best of all—NO TAX. All a twenty-year-old female college student could want, right? Well, it certainly made my summer all the more exciting. Being the fashion guru that I am, I was itching to jump right into all eight malls in the surrounding area. Everything was hunky-dory until our trip to Franklin-Mills Mall, where I experienced my most extreme case of culture shock. Setting my purchases on the counter the young sales clerk asked, "Will this be all for you?" to which I regretfully

replied, "Yes ma'am." These two words would haunt me for the remainder of my trip.

"Oh my! Where are you from? Say that again! Again, again, again!" I became the center of attention with my ostensibly foreign speech patterns. I admit it was fun at first, especially when people gave me food and various paraphernalia for absolutely free, but it was as if they had never seen a full-blooded "Georgia Peach" before. It was at this point I began to realize why people don't travel much anymore. Who wants to be known as the "Y'all come back now, ya hear?" girl from that remote countryside—oh what's it called—oh yeah, Georgia. When you go traveling outside of your hometown, you are always the one with the accent and you must dually enjoy and suffer the consequences. Needless to say, I was equally teased, admired, and rewarded for my way with words.

I must confess, however, that the North has some tasty victuals. My first experience at a diner was one that was simultaneously fulfilling and embarrassing. The menu was at least ten pages front and back, single-spaced, with a ten-point font size if not smaller. (You tend to notice font size and line spacing after a spring semester of nothing but English courses.) Anything that you could possibly imagine as a type of food was included on that menu, everything except grits. I sat in awe as Tracey's family giggled and asked, "So what are you going to have?" I laughed and proceeded to turn to the beverages section. Our waitress asked, "Whatcha want to drink doll?" Completely forgetting where I was, I quickly responded, "I'll have a sweet tea—no lemon."

The table erupted with laughter; it was a simple case of open mouth, insert foot. I forgot that when we left Georgia, not only did we leave the land of right-hand turns on red, pick-up trucks, and “yes ma’am,” but we also left the land of sweet tea. It’s funny how you learn to appreciate the simple things when you are stripped from them on your summer vacation. Finally, I managed to order a root beer and a cheese steak without causing too much of a ruckus. I was indubitably the highlight and primary entertainment for the evening. But I can’t complain; the food was fabulous and I was in good company.

Much like Christmas break, the two-week vacation flew by entirely too fast; when Sunday came, I had to pack my things up and leave just when I had gotten accustomed to the Jersey way of things. I learned to appreciate jug handles and traffic circles; it was more time to purposely mis-sing Jimmy Eat World’s “The Sweetness” in the van with a family who treated me as their own. I learned how to manage my time—sharing one bathroom with seven people, how to properly eat a slice of pizza—fold, fold, bite, and how to cut loose and be a kid again and ride the tilt-a-whirl one too many times. In spite of my moments of embarrassment and it being a considerable ten degrees colder, I thoroughly enjoyed my time in Jersey. In some strange way, I returned home a happier, more accepting individual. So if you ever feel the need to travel some place far, far away to be culturally educated, don’t think you have to hop on a plane to London, Paris, or Rome;

just drive fourteen hours north and stop in at a diner. Order a sweet tea and tell them that I sent you.

*The Sharecropper's Mule*Stephen Hawks

The one that shares his fate,
The one he almost loves—if he were able,
He beats her in the field,
Knowing he cannot bear
Another year,
Another split yield,
Seeing his family waste.

The one he beats,
Enough to make her flee
The scant feed and the dreaded chore
That she is frozen in face of,
After the worthy blow,
Recovers her stride—
Bides her time:

Another season locked in harness,
Evenings, eating the dust of the old one,

Awaiting the glue factory or the far field
To rot in the sun on a hot day in June,
Not too far off for him,
His pallid eyes,
A mirror of One's own assumed life,

Biding this time,
Knowing, when he will not,
Disturbed by a fly or low on sleep,
The baby sick, you heard her in the night...

—what is salvation—

Even you know he cannot wait,
But takes your time
Allotted with his,
To bring this field to yield,
As you yield, prone in the harness,

Fixed on nothing but this repeated task,
Year in, year out,

At the day's end
Knowing which moment

He will be content enough in his stride
To forget your stubbornness and his own,
Almost to sense in this useful bond
The lacking love.

You know the moment,
Have calculated in the cabal of animal consciousness,
The seemingly random point in time,
That you and he were born for,
Precisely when:

You stop abruptly;
He flies forward,
Shatters his knees on the plow.

Anyone as near
As the far fence by the road
Might stop and think:
There is a righteous man,
Bent in the furrow just laid,
Behind his gaunt mule,
In prayer thanking God
Or blessing the seed,
Asking for a good yield;

While there he knows,
It is God who has bent him,
Now God's righteousness:
And he doesn't cry out,
But sees, he too may lie in the far field and rot...

This year the field may go
And both mules die,
One for want of feed,
The other worn out.

He is there, silent, past pain,
Knowing soon his wife will come,
Seeing he has not,
Undo the mule put her up,

Only after she stands alone,
While the two human kind make their way,
Ambling towards helplessness,
He leaning upon her frail breast,
Back to the ramshackledness
Of their unceasing demise,

And in that brief span
She breathes deep the evening air,

Expanding taut the leather straps
Fifty to a hundred times or more,
Knowing however a mule may know:

The purpose of his suffering. . . .

*Jazz Joint*Lauren Bausch

Tucked away in a disguised dump
Referred to as "downtown" by many
And "uptown" by few,
Lies an often disregarded club past the
Corner of 19th and Main
Some temporarily retreat to this
Antique atmosphere of another era in
Refusal to retire familiar nostalgia
Of better times,
While others are drawn by the
Chords, rhythms, and beats.
Patent-leather parades on musty men
A-clad in Sunday's best to impress
Pipe and teeth cane clinched in hand
And sly smirk stretched in perverted pleasure
An unripened waitress dispenses
Another round to bar stool buddies
Clanking mugs in cheer,

Wishing silently to drown herself
In smoke-shrouded sorrow.
Tantalizing tastes of jazz
Ooze in melodious molasses
Of sleazy, sultry sax,
And for a brief moment,
Every craving listener
Becomes mesmerized in this musical magic.
The couple in the corner
Gaze adoringly upon each other,
Toast to times, and after a few hours and drinks,
Depart in drunken anticipation.
Painted faces in dark, revealing dresses
And stilettos flaunt their girdled figures
In gruesome gyrations.
Festivities falter.
The voice from the bar
Announces the familiar finale—
“Last call.”

*Pictures on the Wall*Stephen Hawks

Compilation in flight,
Mere pictures—seeming
Gestures—accomplished,
A personal nakedness
Where the lie is uneasy.

This—that—this. . . .

And it isn't you?

So it is what you want.

Without it
Just more ephemeral loss—

But this is worse,
The perpetual end in the future.

You cannot be so obsessed
With how things crumble,
However they do. . . .

So, communication,
Even this aim,
Transcribed,
In the end,
At the end,
By then,
Beyond—
You hope or have,

Even so—

The savior is a work as well.

The New World

Nick Norwood

Mannlicher, a minor state official

The King, had he lived, would have invented the automobile,
With a bud vase in the backseat, a moon roof in the coupe.
Even pickups would come equipped with an opera window, and roads
built

For the express purpose of winding gently into the mountains.
Young people would come to park their open roadsters in the dark
And look out over the twinkling lights of the valley. They would
make furtive love

On the rich and voluptuous upholstery of their fathers. Songs
Would be written about them, a new form of music engendered,
And some would say it was the real poetry of the new age.
Soon, the entire culture would commit itself to its world view,
Until even the old and middle-aged were going at it naïvely
In their cars. Think of them now, their skin exposed to the night air,
A little loose but looking almost new under the simulated starlight
Of the dashboard. That ringing noise which interrupts them

Is a personal telephone call from the King, conducted
On the outdated princess model he keeps by his bed, and placed
Merely to remind them he is still alive, that he will never die.

*The Stillness*Doraine Bennett

I.

She opens gifts with one hand, the other
Restless on her belly, fingers
Searching for the bony heel that roams
Her inner landscape.
She heaves herself
From the chair and shuffles
To the kitchen where no one can read
The questions writing themselves
Beneath the surface
Of her mind.

She picks a broken cookie from
The floor, wipes crumbs
From the counter, rearranges
The napkins, the salt,
The pepper, thinking
Of the child

In the manger, the silent
Night, the holy night.
She touches her forehead
To the pane of glass and feels
The cold on her nose.
No breeze rustles through the trees.

2.

Two nurses whisper at the door.
A pulsing line on a black screen
Registers the peak
While the flat line beneath
Registers nothing.
She stares at the monitor,
Then turns her face
To the wall. The man
Beside her strokes her arm,
Offers her ice, winces
As the jagged line pulses higher.
She pulls away fingering her taut skin,
And breathes against the pointless
Pain ramming through her body.
Grinding down she pushes
While the doctor pulls.

3.

Ten fingers and toes,
Each tipped by a tiny nail,
She strokes them gently so
They lay curled across her thumb,
Wisps of brown hair standing on end,
The nose just where it should be,
Lips curved in a half-smile,
Eyelashes and brows resting on closed lids—
Perfect, but for breath.

4.

The mending basket still sits
By the door. The cookbook lies open
Where dinner from aeons ago
Remains untouched. She flinches
At the odor of ashes from the fireplace
And breathes a silent thankyou that someone
Has removed the cradle.
Her eyes avoid the yellow blanket
Lying in its open box on the chair.
The impulse to hurl a dish through the window
Grows with each plate, saucer, bowl
She removes from the table.
She reaches for the coffee cup.

The impact with the wall shatters
The fragile thing. Coffee, half-drunk,
Pools on the floor where she crumples
Amidst the shards, pulls the blanket
Beneath her chin, and moans
Herself a lullaby.

A Pile of Slippers

Nadine Smith

“Flip . . . Flop . . . Flip . . . Flop . . . Flip . . . Flop” O.K., I guess I can understand why you would call those types of footwear flip-flops, they do make that noise when you walk. But my father, who was born and raised in Hawaii, calls them “slippahs.” To me flip-flops are simply slippers; I just “second-generationized” the word. When I was old enough to respond to commands, my Pops would call out to me in his Pidgin English, “Nenka, get mah slippahs.” I would scurry to the mudroom, rummage through the pile of slippers and fetch the biggest pair I could find. Instead of carrying them to him, I would slip them on my tiny little feet and attempt to walk in his slippers.

To walk in my dad’s big slippahs is no easy task. Sometimes, I stumble. Many times, I fall. But all of the time it is slow moving, one careful step at a time. I look up to my father—not literally of course—because Pops is a short Filipino man. But I aspire to live by his metaphysics. Pops has—forgive me, Father—this Rodney King attitude; “can’t we all just get along?” It is Dad’s willingness to get along with everyone, his “Kumbayah philosophy” that I truly admire. He makes friends with anybody and everybody. He has the mysterious ability to find a redeeming quality in the most annoying, boring, lazy, bold, pretentious, crazy, pathetic people in the world. My Pops is not even educated (dropped out of high school) but he finds a com-

mon ground with everyone. Nor is my Pops religious (converted to Catholicism only to marry my mom) but he is a very spiritual man. The most complicated thing my dad has ever said to me—when I was a little grasshopper—was “Nenka, love people.” I identify the most with my father and his slippahs. I was born on the island of Hawaii too. But when I was very young, my father’s job in the Air force transplanted our loving family to an uptight snobby New England town.

The quaint little town of Holyoke, Massachusetts never warmly welcomed my father’s idealistic philosophy and his slipper-shod family. Immediately, I was an outcast in the whitewashed Catholic grammar school I attended. Perpetual Help was a place where the pupils were as narrow as the halls and as tainted as the windows. Out of the hundreds of class photographs of smiling children plastered on the purely white walls there was one lonely little “brown” girl. It was me. I was different. And my peers never let me forget it. Catcalls of “chink,” “gook,” and “slant-eyes” reverberated in the halls and rolled out of the windows into the playground. The sunny happy playground—which I often stood alone in—was overgrown with weeds and thorn bushes. So! I didn’t want to play there anyway! But I did. I always did. Often, I’d come home sad, lonely, and whining to my daddy. My daddy would help me take off my Buster-Browns, put my slippers on my feet, and send me out to play with cousin Curtis. Cousin Curtis was a neighborhood Filipino kid whose parents always played Mah Jong with my parents. His family wore slippers like us, there was a pile at their doorway, they ate rice every day like us, and amazingly Curtis looked exactly like me—slant eyes and all! The only difference between Curtis and me was that he wore silk underwear

because he was from the Philippines. It was a difference that I often giggled about but one that I could handle.

But I didn't always handle differences with a simple little giggle. From junior high to high school, I didn't even recognize my own bitter heathen laughter. I didn't even know who I was because instead of following my father, I followed my friends. And yes, I would have jumped off a bridge to follow them. Actually, I did jump off a bridge into the Connecticut River. It was crazy. I was crazy. To fit in with my peers I would do stupid senseless things. I'd get into fights. Stay out all night. Skip school. Smoke cigarettes. Get drunk. Do drugs and have sex. And I didn't wear slippers. Slippers weren't cool, and I was cool. My Pops knew what I was up to but he was patient with me. Maybe a little too patient. He just kept on telling me, "Family is da most important ting, Nenka." Yeah right, Pops! What do you know? My friends are my family now. And what ever happened to the million billion times you told me to "love people?" I'm loving people, Pops, so what's the problem?

The problem was that when push came to shove and I got pregnant, my friends disappeared. Grammar school came back to haunt me because the Holyoke High School halls were just as narrow—maybe it was because of my big baby belly. The new catcalls were "slut," "tramp," and "whore." Totally unfit for me, the baby's father was only my second boyfriend, plus he died in a car accident doing one of those crazy, stupid, senseless things. The only person that I constantly hung around with during my pregnancy was my father. Pops never said anything of importance to me. We just watched television and ate rice in silence. I did know what his favorite song was—only because mom told me—"Papa Don't Preach" by Madonna. My

father just ain't the Madonna type but I guess the song fit well for the situation. And when baby Marisha was born, my father was the third person to hold her. I was eighteen and it was the first time I saw my father cry. He cradled my little baby in his arms, looked up at me and carefully uttered the word, "Family." My father preached volumes with just one word and I had an inkling that it tied into his whole "love people" homily. So I started faithfully following my slipper-wearing father again. I followed him right back to where we were born—Hawaii.

It took me fifteen years to get back to the Island for my brother's wedding, with my little grasshopper in tow. Immediately, I knew I was at home when I noticed a pile of slippers in every doorway to every house. Slippers of all shapes and sizes deposited on pineapple throw rugs a myriad of different colors and styles, mixing and mingling in a big happy heaping pile. It didn't matter that I didn't know the names of half of my cousins, my dozen aunties, or my handful of uncles—Filipinos breed like rabbits—nor did it matter that most of the people that I met were not even blood related. We were one big family that wore flip-flops and all of us called them "slippers." My grandpa—God rest his soul—tried to marry me off to rich Filipino men when I was there because I was a single mom. But, I averted his attempts. Instead, I went back to New England and married a white boy.

I should have known our marriage would not work out. Bill was the type of man who bought his first pair of slippers at age twenty-nine and only because of my constant nagging. To me, his "slippers" were the high-tech, name-brand, fancy-schmancy, fifty-dollar sandals that did not actually qualify for the coveted name. And honestly, I called

them slippers to pacify him, to make him feel like part of the slipper-wearing family. He did own a pair of slippers, but for some reason his manly-man Army attitude deemed them "shower shoes"; thus he only wore them in the shower. Who in their right mind would call slippers shower shoes? Blaspheme! It drove me crazy that day-in day-out Bill refused to add his "slippers" to the pile at our doorway. He would brazenly tramp around the house with his feet fully covered.

Whenever I would comment on his transgressions, he would dismiss me. And still I loved him. I loved him the way my father had taught me. And I only saw the good in Bill. I was totally blinded by the good until lie after lie surfaced and the house that we built on sand crumbled to the ground.

In the chaos of fourteen years worth of rubble my baby Marisha was injured. I only hope that one day she can forgive me. I pray that one day she can forgive Bill and me. I "messed up" her sixteen-year-old life by relocating our little family to Georgia because of Bill. "Georgaa," a place where she has absolutely no friends and now has just me for family. The only saving grace about Georgia that my daughter and I enjoy is wearing our slippers almost year round. I hope one day Pooh will realize what wearing slippers can mean. So I sent her back to New England to be with Grandma and Grandpa. For a couple of weeks, she had Grandpa calling to her, "Risha Pisha, get mah slippahs." I think it helped her.

It helped me to collect my thoughts while Rishie Pooh was away. I was very angry and confused. I blamed myself. I blamed the Teva-wearing Bill. And I blamed God. Oh boy! Did I blame God! I cried until I choked on my own tears. I couldn't sleep or eat; the constant

questions wouldn't allow me hunger or rest. Why did this happen? What went wrong? Why did Bill do this to us? Didn't Bill love me? Why God? Why? Why wasn't my love enough? Until one day, I finally threw up from my self-pity feast. I took a shower, shaved my legs, put on a tank top and shorts, and stumbled out the door with my slippers on my feet.

I ended up on a Gulf Coast beach. I fell into the warm sand and buried my exposed feet. My slippers dangling from my hands, I listened to the waves crash in and wanted so badly to throw my slippers into the ocean. I wanted to abandon the part of me that caused me so much pain; loving people only created heartache. But I watched the smiling laughing barefoot families frolicking on the beach. And I sat until the sun hid gently behind the ocean. I stayed there until everyone left and I was all alone, and I realized I could never live like that . . . utterly alone. And utterly alone is what I would be if I forsake love. I waited for the tears to come but there were no more tears left. I half-heartedly wished to die because I was petrified to love again. But I knew—I know—that God has His own plan and for some strange reason I felt that He was carrying me.

So I got up, washed my feet clean, put on my slippers and went back home. Back home to the house that God built. For almost a year, I forgot what the inside of a church looked like. I fell away from God, and almost fell away from the One True Love. I admit I struggled with the Biblical account of divorce (yes, Catholics do read the Bible), until I realized all God wants is for families to be happy. Since I knew that my love *alone* could not sustain our little family, I found peace in God's house, and found peace with seeking a divorce. I am just taking it one slow lazy slipper step at a time. And some-

times I wear my slippers when I go to church every Sunday. Actually whenever it is warm out, I do wear my slippers and I shuffle my feet all the way to the door. The older gentlemen and ladies of the church look at me and cast their scathing eyes down to my feet. I know what they are thinking, “flip-flops are not appropriate attire.” But, I beg to differ, slippers are certainly church wear . . . slippers are family wear. I wish one day to see a big, happy, heaping pile in front of the church doorway. Then maybe people would understand...we all walk on common ground. And by the way, didn't Jesus wear slippers? I know my father wears slippers, even in the harsh cold days in New England—because Pops is only human—he just wears them with socks, Japanese style.

Both of my Fathers command me simply to love people. And I do, and I always will, it is the only way that I know how to live. I'm not afraid; life is too short to worry about getting hurt. Yes, I admit, it is hard for me to walk in my Father's slippers. Sometimes, I stumble. Most times, I fall. And as always, I take one careful step at a time. And I falter . . . mostly because I try to strong-arm my local Georgia friends to call their flip-flops slippers. I just can't tolerate the huge disparity in meaning; flip-flops are just a sound, slippers are a way of life. I often cringe when I hear them say “flip-flops,” but hey, I guess I can and I will forgive them. Because all of my friends have to pile up their slippers at the doorway to my home, which means no matter what they call their footwear, my friends will always find love and acceptance in my family.

Still Standing

Hirofumi Motegi

At Ground Zero



Why I Write

Jennifer Roach

When I was in middle school, my best friends were Rebecca and Krissie Taylor, Randy Harding, Nell Peters, and Joshua Chrissly. They weren't great friends, though; Krissie shot herself with her father's pistol, Randy died of a heart attack at his own wedding, and Josh kicked over from cancer that he had been battling for years. Nell refused to go back to work as a candy stripper at the hospital after her patient died, and Becky had a nervous breakdown, ran away from home, became a junkie, abandoned all her old friends, and started seeing apparitions of her dead sister on bridges during thunderstorms. Come to think of it, they were awesome friends; they did everything I told them to do.

These nutcases were my friends, my creations, the imagination of a similar nutcase. In the two novels that I wrote over the three-year span of middle school, I controlled every last action of these characters, these nonexistent human beings. I made them hurt. I made them love. I made them die. But I couldn't make them live; no matter how hard I tried, I could not bring their suffering from the neat, crisp typewritten pages to the minds and hearts of my readers (Ezra

Pound they were not; they were preteens with about the right amount of imagination to appreciate Beavis and Butthead. But, hey, when you're thirteen, you'll take what you can get). But even I could not always "feel" the characters, and I was their God.

Some would say that this is why I write: for the control over these people, their fictitious lives, their heartbreaks and their joys. In part, this analysis is true. Like the great Emily Dickinson, Elizabeth Bishop, and Bill Clinton, the prospect of creating my own little world and having complete control over it (when I have absolutely no control over anything in the real world) fascinates me. I saw my characters as helpless little creatures, little puppets who needed their strings pulled. Yet this is not the true reason why I write.

Over time, I began to see what my problems were with my novels: the characters were not real because the things that I had happen to them were not real; at least, they were not real in my life. I had never had a sister commit suicide, so therefore I did not know how to express the voice of a young fifteen-year-old girl who had witnessed her own sister die. The same was true of all of my melodramatic, Harlequinesque writing; I was simply not made of the fiction author material. I attempted (with no luck) to expansively edit my novels so that their trifling lives could mirror my own, but when I took away their soap opera lives, they became even more limp and lifeless. I had to face the fact that my life was not meant to be the basis of the Great American Novel. So, while I loved my babies dearly, I had to pull the plug on them, and I turned to an autobiographical viewpoint

in my writing in a much different way.

I began to write poetry, and lots of it. I was the quintessential fifteen-year-old girl whose bedroom held piles of frayed, weathered, worn-out notebooks full of poetry, some mushy-gushy and some scary as hell; there was always a boy whom either I loved with all of my heart or I hated for ruining my life, depending on the day, and he would serve as inspiration for dozens of my scribbled verse. I was a young, budding confessional poet before I even knew who Sylvia Plath or Robert Lowell were. As I grew in my poetry, I learned not to hold anything back; I learned that it was okay to swear in a poem (all the greats do it, dammit) and insert sexual innuendo into the lines (although, at fifteen, that pretty much meant open-mouthed kissing). I believed that I had finally found my ultimate niche, my place in the sun, where my words could be derived from my own heart-wrenching experiences and hold the utmost truth for me.

Some might say that this, now, is the reason why I write: to be able to translate my own life into words to share with the entire human race, to feel as if we are all connected because we read one's words and find a hint of ourselves in them. Yet, again, this is not exclusively why I write, because, unlike Plath, not only am I not suicidal, but I'm not all that great of a confessional poet either. Nobody knew what the heck I was talking about in my poems because they were so personal. I had tried to relate such intimate details of my life that no one knew what they meant, and were left empty-handed when trying to decipher my cryptic lines. As any good little English major would

agree, usually the best poetry is the stuff that has to be mulled over and contemplated for days, maybe years, until the little light bulb finally clicks. Yet, in my case, no one was willing to give it a try. Even the people whom the poetry was about did not realize I was talking about them because the meaning was so deeply buried. (What idiot could not figure out that the queen bee sitting in the hive waiting for her servants to do her work while she put on her lipstick and wiggled her stinger at her purple hand mirror represents himself? I mean, come on!)

At this point in my life, I am not really sure why I write. I could agree with others who have personally experienced my controlling, domineering side, or I would say that those who believe I find comfort in expressing my pain are correct. In a way, they both are right, but in other ways, the reason why I put paper to pen is so much more than that, and so much more than I probably will ever understand. I write because, unlike my characters of yore who were caged within their white sheets of paper, I live.

Love

Hirofumi Motegi

Dedicated to my grandmother



Clouds on the Water

Efrain Garza



Letter from the Editor

Jennifer Roach

On behalf of the *Arden* staff of Columbus State University, I would like to thank all our contributors for making this 2004 issue of *Arden* the best yet. Each year, the quality of the journal increases greatly, both in content and appearance. We are excited about the future of the journal as it grows each passing year.

The selection process was a tough one this year; with so many quality pieces of work to consider, the debate took much longer than anticipated. We wish we could have had the space to publish every piece we received. But sadly, a choice had to be made, and those who were chosen should be proud to be considered among the top entries.

First of all, many thanks go to Mr. Larry Kees, Dean of Students, for allowing us the necessary funding for this growth! We are in your debt, and we hope you are pleased with the finished product. Secondly, thanks to Dr. Norwood and Mrs. Woods, who were brave enough to come back for another year. Thank you for your endless help and advice. Lastly, a big thank-you to the staff members. I know it got crazy at times, but you all stuck with it. Thank you for your tireless patience and all your hard work. After three years of

serving on the Arden staff, it is finally time for me to pass on the torch to someone else. . . . Whoever it is, I hope you're ready!

Congratulations to the contributors, and thanks to all who submitted their work. We wish you good luck in the future with your creative pursuits!

Jennifer Roach

Arden Editor-in-Chief

Arden is published annually with funding by the Student Activities Committee. Selections for publication are made in the winter of every year by a staff composed of CSU students and led by two faculty advisors.

All submissions are judged "blindly," without regard to name, race, or gender. None of the editors know whose work they are considering before a final decision is made.

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